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Caswell (E. J.)

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ANNUAL ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

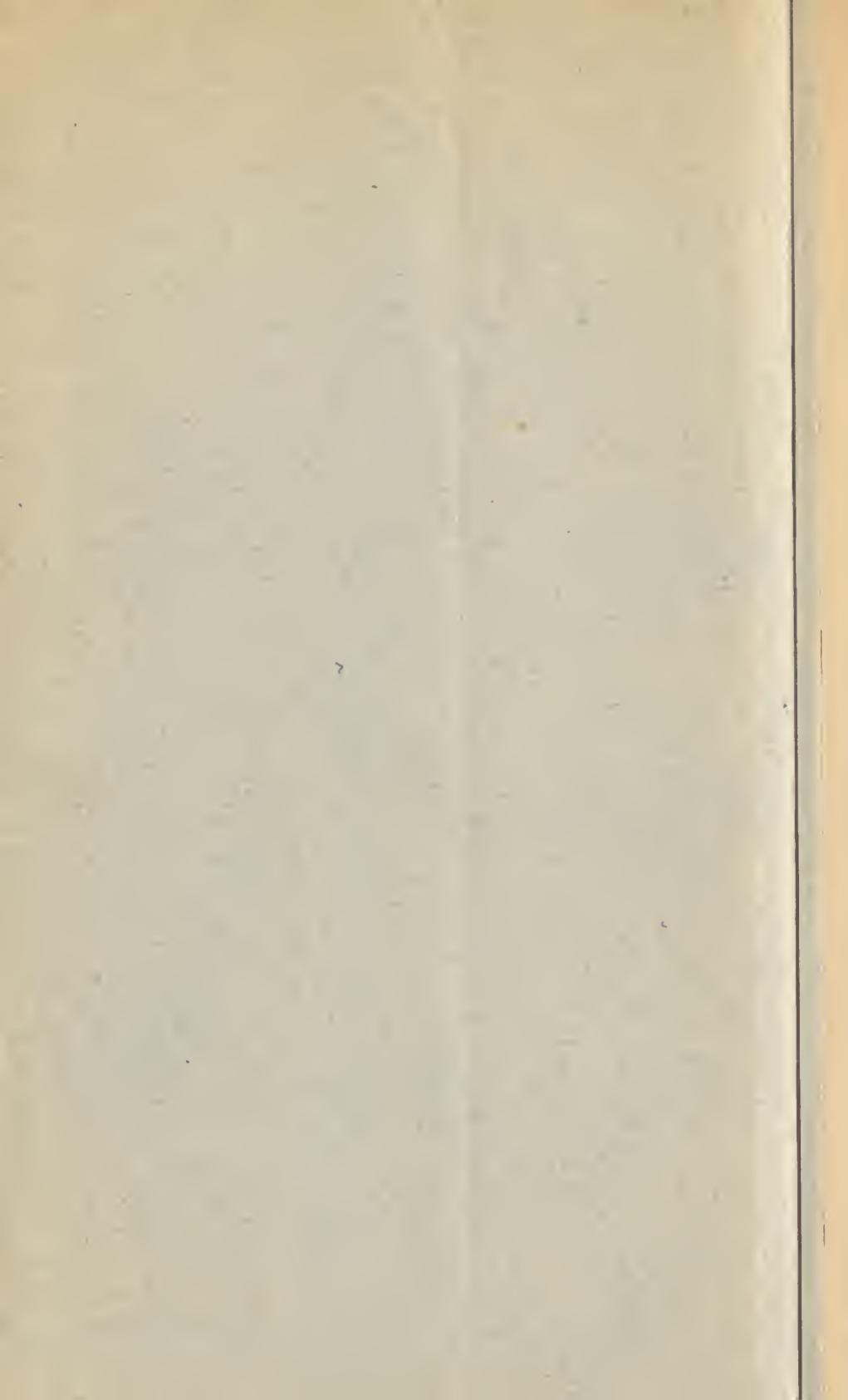
Rhode Island Medical Society,

JUNE 16th, 1878.

—BY—

EDWARD T. CASWELL, M. D.

34.



MEDICAL EDUCATION.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

The Rhode Island Medical Society,

AT ITS

ANNUAL MEETING, JUNE 16, 1875.

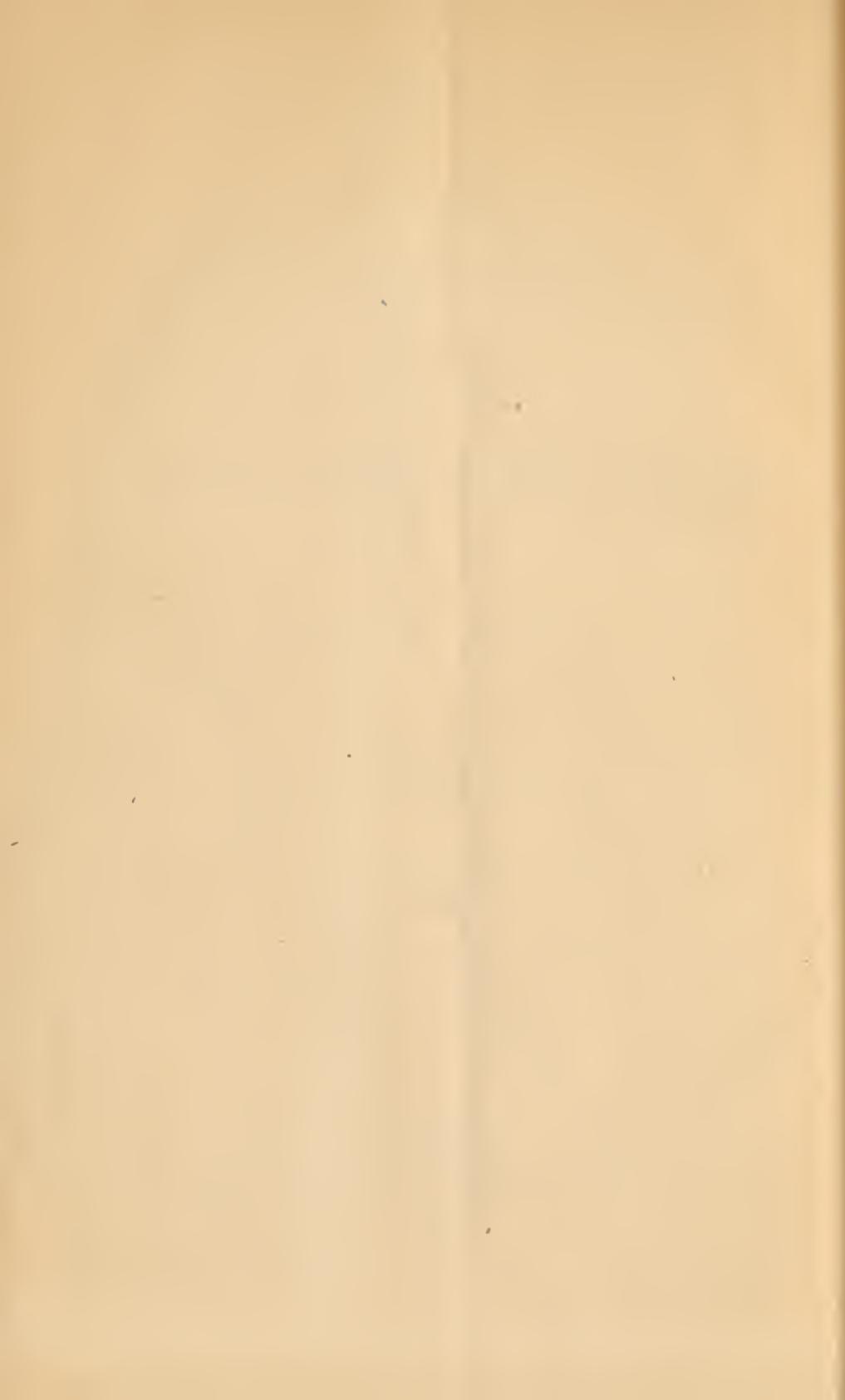
BY

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PRINTED BY THE PROVIDENCE PRESS COMPANY, 22 WEYBOSSET ST.
1875.



ADDRESS.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE SOCIETY:

Another year has passed around and to-day finds us once more assembled, to celebrate the sixty-fourth anniversary of the foundation of our Society, to set the machinery in motion for another year, to discuss such topics of professional and scientific interest as may come before us, to extend to each other the cordial hand of friendly greeting, and to welcome among us members of our profession from sister societies. These are pleasing duties to the performance of which we all come, I doubt not, with ready hearts, and thoughts on high purpose bent. The usages of the day also impose upon you, and upon me, another duty. They demand that you shall interrupt the spirited discussion of some interesting topic, and, with appetites keenly alive to the repast that is awaiting you in yonder hall, that you shall yet stop to listen to an annual address; and of me, in the present instance, they demand that amount and degree of mental pabulum that shall keep you from longing too much after the flesh-pots, and shall yet put you, after your animated discussions, into that most favorable condition of repose that shall best fit you for the more arduous labors yet in store. In obedience then to these established customs I shall claim

your attention for a few moments while I present to you a subject which has long elicited my most earnest sympathies and support, and for which I shall hope to claim yours.

I purpose to consider the subject of Medical Education as it exists among us, and to show what I consider its deficiencies, and I trust that it may not be considered presuming in me to bring this subject before you at this time. We are all of us called upon to direct the course of young men who come within the circle of our influence, and who seek to follow in our footsteps. To each one of us may and will come the responsibility of giving advice at least, and it behooves us to consider well the chart that we place in the hands of the young voyager,—to know thoroughly the strength of the timber, and the completeness of the rigging before we launch our crafts upon the ocean. I say a sense of responsibility should attach itself to every one of us, who advises a young man to enter upon the study of our profession, or who directs his footsteps therein ; and hence it is fit that we should stop to consider what we propose to do.

We must all acknowledge, I think, that the course of education in our profession has not changed materially in the country at large for the last fifty years. I do not now refer to the teachings of the schools ; they have kept pace with the advances in the physical and medical sciences. But the course which a young man follows to-day, with few exceptions, is very much the same as that followed by our fathers and by theirs. A young man fresh from school enters his name in your office, reads a little medicine for a year, rides a little, sees some of the patients that come into your office, attends two courses of lectures, and graduates a doctor. More than eighteen hundred young men have, in this year of grace 1875, received the degree of Doctor of Medicine from the different colleges in our land, and of how large a proportion do you suppose any other statement

would be correct than the one I have just given? Is it probable, or perhaps even possible, that one-half of them can lay any just claim to the title that has been conferred upon them? What does the very name of *doctor* imply but that he who bears it is *learned*, and think you that one-half of these young men are in any sense learned? Would that they were for their own interests and for the interest of those whose lives and whose well-being will be entrusted to their care. But a natural sifting process will be constantly going on, and of those eighteen hundred how many shall we find at the end of five or ten years have slipped out of the harness? A mistake was made in the choice of the profession—or the way was too rugged—or some gilded prize was within their reach, and they forsook the path that had been unwisely laid out for them. Of the rest some will attain to the highest places in our profession known and read of all men. Many more will fall into the rank and file, pursuing with earnestness and devotion, with the true *esprit du corps*, the duties which engross one's whole thought, which involve weary days and sleepless nights, which at times weigh heavily with responsibilities and anxieties, but which bring with them, and happy they to whom it so comes, the satisfaction of duties faithfully and honestly performed.

But what is there in our profession that should draw such a crowd of young men to its ranks? Is it the glittering success of the few, or is it the idea that though it involves a life of hardship, it secures to its faithful follower a respectable position, and if nothing more a competency? To my mind it is neither of these, but rather the interest which the pursuit of the study itself possesses. The mind that is fond of acquisition may, indeed, like Goethe's Faust, roam through all the realms of philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine, and theology, and gather the sweets from every flower. But to many minds the study of the medical sciences has the

pre-eminent attraction of dealing with their own corporeal beings, with that which they can see and feel, which is part of themselves ; and it is this study of our own humanity which I think is the real source of attraction. Now if the study of our profession does prove so attractive to young men, it is of the utmost importance that they should be so directed as to make that study of the utmost value to them. And here it is that I think your influence and mine can be of some avail.

I know that this matter of medical education has occupied the attention of the profession in our country for some years. You all know that a few years since it figured quite largely in the debates of the American Medical Association, and an association of instructors in medical colleges was formed with the view of elevating the standard of professional education. I fear, however, that its efforts were altogether nugatory, and if I mistake not, the association is now defunct. A recent article in one of our leading medical journals expresses the opinion that no action of State and county societies, nor of the parent society, will be of avail in this matter, but that in the fulness of time public opinion will force a change upon the profession. It seems to me that the power to control also lays with us as individuals—that the influence of each individual, exerted upon those around him, will accomplish the end for which colleges and societies may have labored in vain—that we shall thus lead the opinion of the public.

And here I may say that this very force of public opinion is constantly making stronger and stronger demands upon us as a profession. It keeps pace with the latest investigations in the science, with the latest applications of the art of medicine, and calls upon us to evince our knowledge of the former and make use of the latter. It commits the health of communities to our guardianship, and beyond

the care of the sick, it calls upon us to prevent disease. It demands to know what are the influences that are most favorable to life and health, and what means are to be taken to avert disease. If it finds that cities and towns and villages are decimated by the ravages of epidemic disease, it asks us why we did not instruct the ignorant, point out to them the danger they were in, and see to it that the sources of infection were closed. If it finds that its boasted system of public instruction for the young is attended with evils, that its children, while seeking an education, are laying the seeds of disease from neglect or from excess of zeal, it calls upon us to show to them the *juste milieu* where they can travel in safety. And if we are passive in these matters, if we err through blindness, it visits our ignorance and our slothfulness with severe contempt and well merited rebuke. In short, public opinion is, as it seems to me, constantly demanding a higher and more thorough education for our profession, from the very fact that it is constantly submitting to us questions which the highest education only can answer, and calling upon us to put in practice that which is the result of it alone.

It might seem as if the wide-spread influence of quackery controverted this ground, but I do not believe it. There always have been, and there always will be, a certain proportion of the population, who delight in being imposed upon, whatever form that imposition may take. It does not answer to say that this class belong to the illiterate and the uneducated, for unhappily that is not the fact. It belongs, however, to a peculiar mental constitution. Minds of a weak and uncertain tenure are those from whom quackery fills its pockets for a time, and only for a time. Quackery snatches at every new advance in the profession, and ever and anon assumes a new garb, sometimes even within the walls of science, and flies from pillar to post to maintain its

hold upon its victims. It is for this very purpose of unmasking quackery in its various forms, of enlightening and convincing the public, I maintain, that the highest type of education is a necessity to our profession. There is thus a reciprocal relation between the two. On the one hand, the public makes the demand for the highest medical education imperative, and on the other we demand it for ourselves and for them.

With this demand then, what shall be done to meet it? What can you and I do? In the first place, I think much may be gained by a careful selection of the young men to whom we shall recommend a medical career. My revered friend and instructor, the late President Wayland, used to say, that "many a good cabinet-maker had been spoiled to make a poor minister," and so we may think that many a man has been thrust into a medical career, who would have done himself ampler justice in some other pursuit. Of the qualities that constitute a good physician I shall say nothing. You all know them as well as I do. But I will say that I think it is of the utmost importance in advising young men to study our profession that we should demand above all a high morality and purity of life, fair intellectual gifts, and a capacity and fondness for study; for we are all students, though not of books alone, and must continue such, and he, who has no fondness for study, will make but little progress in his profession. I fear, indeed, that many of us, who are in active life, do little more than study our cases, but I would fain believe that it is the lack of opportunity which constrains us.

Then I think we are too apt to lead young men into the study of the profession at too early an age, and with too little preliminary training. The boy who graduates from our schools or academies, in his sixteenth year, is too young, too immature to undertake the studies which will be put

upon him. His mind lacks both training and development. I must say, though you may not agree with me; that I do think a *collegiate* education is the fitting preparation for entrance upon professional studies. Of course, my remark includes the preparation gained by attendance upon scientific schools as of nearly equal value. I think that, after a boy has left our academies and high schools, he should spend three or four years, in college or in a scientific school, in learning how to study. It is not so much the knowledge gained in these institutions, although that is not to be despised, but it is the learning how to acquire knowledge, the drilling and training of the mind, as the athlete does his muscles, enabling it to concentrate its energies, to endure prolonged effort, teaching it how to grapple with severe problems, how to distinguish the sources of error in human judgment so that they may be avoided—teaching it to think for itself—these are the prime advantages to be derived from such a course. And then come the more secondary advantages of the acquisitions themselves. In this preliminary education, he will acquire some foundation in the physical sciences, in chemistry for instance, which will be of life-long value to him in his professional career. He will gain at least enough Latin and Greek to enable him to appreciate the full force of, and rightly employ, the many terms derived from these languages, in daily use in our profession, and he will also gain the mental discipline which these studies involve. He will secure an introduction to the knowledge of those foreign tongues, which certainly are to-day an essential for a well-read physician. Not long since, I met with a quotation from Prof. Seelye, of the University of Cambridge, in England, in which he tersely says, “As a rule, good books are in German.” Without going so far as that with regard to our medical literature, I will appeal to any one of you who is familiar with the latest and

best writings in any branch of it, and ask if you have failed to observe the constant reference to German monographs and to German investigations, as reported in their rich and varied periodical literature. German and French are, I think, indispensable, and Italian will soon have to be added. For the new awakening, that has come over that smiling land in the last twenty years, has touched its men of science, and they are rousing themselves from their slumbers, and shaking off the lethargy of ages, and it may be that those ancient medical schools of Salerno and Naples, and the far-famed Universities of Bologna, and Padua, and Florence, may yet again rejoice and blossom like the rose.

Then, too, as a result of such a preliminary education, in addition to those advantages having a direct bearing upon his professional career, he will find profit in the breadth of culture which is opened up to him—in the elevated tastes which his contact with the minds of the past will develop,—and throughout his whole life, his sources of enjoyment and his capacity for benefiting his fellow-men will be increased. It is not, I regret to say, that these benefits accrue to every one, to whom the opportunity of acquiring them is offered, nor are they, on the other hand, always withheld from those, whom a sterner fortune has not led to these founts of learning. Indeed, to my mind there is nothing more ennobling than the endeavor made, by many an earnest gifted man, to supply in after-life the deficiencies of youthful opportunities. I have known such men, of mature years, in the active pursuit of our profession, set themselves deliberately down to the acquisition of a foreign tongue, and accomplish it to that degree, that the whole wealth of its literature was open to them. Such men will educate themselves in spite of every difficulty, and in truth we are all, in one sense, self-educated, for if we do not educate and train ourselves who can do it for us? But by

pursuing the course of instruction of our colleges and scientific schools, the mode of acquiring that education is made ten-fold easier than it would be, if we were left to our own unaided resources.

Nor need the item of expense deter young men from entering upon this preliminary course. The mere cost of collegiate education was never so little as it is now. In nearly all our schools and colleges, endowments stand ready for the use of those who will but apply, and why should not the young man who aspires to heal the sick, and bind up the bleeding wound, secure the advantages of these endowments, as well as he who is to be looked up to as our father in God. The young man who is bent upon acquiring an education will accomplish it at all hazards. The difficulty is to arouse that desire in his heart, and here is where you and I must use our influence. Tell him that the few years spent in acquiring this preliminary education, instead of being lost to him in a professional sense, will be a positive gain; tell him that, if he is true to himself, his subsequent professional progress will be the more rapid for this delay at the start; tell him that, with these additional years of study, he will at the end be quite young enough to assume the grave responsibilities that are lying in wait for him.

You see, then, gentlemen, the opinion which I hold, and I submit to you, if it is not the wisest and best. If ours is to be, what it is considered, one of the learned professions, shall we not as members qualify ourselves for that high place, by no one-sided education, but by a broad and liberal culture, which makes us in the truest sense educated men?

With these views, which I have long held, I hail with gladness the omen which comes to us from old Harvard. The announcement is made that "In and after September, 1877, all students seeking admission to the Medical School must

present a degree in letters or science, from a recognized college or scientific school, or pass an examination in Latin or French or German and in Physics." "The examinations will be conducted in writing, and in judging the work of the candidates, the *spelling, grammar* and *construction* will be considered." That I maintain is a long step forward, and in the right direction. It will, I think, do more to elevate the standard of professional attainment than all that has been accomplished by a score of associations. It will not be long before the other leading medical colleges will follow this good example, and a preliminary examination or a degree will be the pre-requisite for entering upon the course of professional study. But I believe that this is but the thin edge of the entering wedge, and in a short time, if I mistake not, the degree alone will be accepted.

Since these lines were penned, I see that the President of the American Medical Association, at its late session, addressed that body upon this same subject, and has made this demand already, although in terms which it seems to me, at least, are not felicitous, and at the same time adding to it a complicated machinery. He proposes that it should be "solemnly resolved by the Association, that it shall be regarded as derogatory to the character of any physician, in any part of the United States, to take under his care as a student of medicine, any one who cannot exhibit evidence of having taken a degree in a regularly chartered college, or a certificate of qualifications necessary to become a student of medicine from a Board of Examiners, appointed for this purpose by the American Medical Association." Such is his language. I fully agree with the editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, in declaring this at the least premature, and as for the examination by a Board of the Association, I should have very little faith in the amount of work such a Board would perform. The action in this

matter must, it seems to me, emanate from the medical schools, in response to a demand from the profession, and therefore, it is to the individual that the appeal must be made, and to you, therefore, I make it. But although it may at present be premature to demand that every applicant for medical studies shall have pursued a college course or its equivalent, I think the time is close at hand when this order will be established, and I am sure it would be for the best interests of the profession, and for it I would enlist your support.

We have thus far had to do merely with the preliminary education of the medical student. I propose briefly to consider the course of professional study; and here, I think, many changes are to be affected, which will be of infinite advantage to the student. Indeed, since I graduated in medicine, many changes have been introduced but more, I am sure, are to follow. I know that I am treading upon difficult ground, and one on which many contests have occurred, but I think free discussion of the subject will cause the truth eventually to appear, and its agitation will perhaps hasten the development that is desired. The address to which I have referred, and that of the President of the Association of Medical Editors, on the preceding evening, show that the professional mind in different parts of the country, is thoroughly awake to the consideration of this subject, and this, I trust, will eventually lead to decided and concerted action.

As to the plan of study in the medical colleges, we all know that, in the most of them, it consists of attendance upon two full courses of lectures in successive winters. That is, the student goes over the same ground twice. All of us remember the months that we have spent listening to lecture after lecture, hour after hour, during the day, with the attendance upon quiz classes in the intervals, with

evenings given up to dissection, and with weekly or bi-weekly interruptions of the lectures to attend upon the clinics. How this plan of teaching ever came to assume the position it holds, and has held for so long a time I cannot imagine. To me it seems radically wrong; wrong in its conception, and wrong in its execution. Too much is crammed into the student's head to find any lodgment there. No time is allowed for arranging and digesting all that is forced upon him. Anatomy and physiology, chemistry, *materia medica*, theory and practice, surgery, and obstetrics, have all been paraded before him, and he catches a glance here, and a glance there. And as the matter now stands, this is for the stripling who is just out of a high school, as well as for him who has gone through a college, and already attended one or two courses of lectures. It is indeed true that, in some of the larger medical colleges, these courses are supplemented by a summer course, in which the pupil comes into closer relations with the instructor, but the proportion of the winter class in attendance upon the summer course is quite small.

I have always believed that recitation is the most valuable method for fixing knowledge in the mind. If a young man is required to state, in his own language, what he knows about the matter in hand, he will be much more likely to arrive at accurate and certain ideas, than if he merely listens to a lecture, and perhaps takes notes of the points that strike him as important, and trusts to these until the final day of reckoning comes, when he is summoned to appear for examination. It is to supply this very need that quiz classes are established in connection with every college. They endeavor to satisfy this want of the student. They doubtless do a certain amount of good work, and they relieve the professor of much of the drudgery that would be inherent in any other system. But I do not think they take

the place of oral examinations by the instructor himself upon the lecture of the preceding day. It seems to me, and I am speaking of that in which I have had no experience, and I may be ignorant of the difficulties that would pertain to such a course, but it seems to me, that the instruction should be by lecture and recitation combined. This, of course, would throw the didactic instruction upon the younger and less distinguished men, and would leave the brilliant lecturer free for clinical instruction. It would also involve a greater expenditure of time; that is, it would lengthen the time that a young man would be in attendance upon the medical school, and this is a result I should desire.

Shall I venture to say what I think would be of the greatest value to the young man, and to the profession? Without being a graduate of Harvard, I must say that I have watched with deep interest the experiments that have been there made, in this matter of a change in medical education, and I am glad to believe that it seems likely to be successful. They have carried out what has for a long time seemed to me to be the true plan. I do not know the entire detail of the system as is there used, but it is sufficient to say that it expands the course of instruction over three full years, at the college, dividing appropriately the time given to the different studies, and examining the student at the end of each year upon the work gone over. That is, to my mind, the truest and best plan, and I say, all hail to Harvard, with all my heart, for taking so long a step in advance of all the medical colleges in the land. What, as I have said, does the study amount to in the office of the instructor, in the interim of lectures as otherwise pursued? Often practically nothing, and sometimes worse than nothing. Let the study be continuous and in an ascending gradation. Do not make the veriest tyro listen to the differential diagnosis between mitral insufficiency and stenosis, when he scarcely knows that there is such a thing in the human machine as a

mitral valve. Let his knowledge come to him gradually, and in something like a natural sequence, and let him have time to make himself thoroughly master of what has been presented to him. Above all things let him have the opportunity of avoiding what is the most detrimental to all progress—the most blighting of all curses—a superficial knowledge. I think we may go one step farther, and say let him give his two or three years to the didactic study of the profession, and to the study of pathological and microscopic anatomy, and then let him build upon this noble structure, well and securely founded, the superstructure of his clinical experience; then let him enter the hospitals, and have daily opportunities of acquiring a practical knowledge of his profession, and of verifying the principles and truths with which his mind has been stored. Thus will he become truly a learned man,—a Doctor of Medicine. He will feel himself, like the Knight of old, armed at all points. Dismay will not settle on his countenance at the suspicion of danger. Responsibilities, grave though they be, will not be shirked, but met with the firm conviction that he is equal to the emergency.

It has been said that this high degree of education would do very well to fit men for practice in the large cities, and as an introduction to the study of specialties; that the majority of professional men practice in the country, and for them such an education is unnecessary. This view I have met in private and in the medical press. Granting that the larger number of physicians will find the sphere of their labors in the more sparsely settled regions of the country, is that any valid reason against a thorough education? Is not human life as precious in the country, as in the city? Are not the complications that may arise in disease the same for the one as for the other? And will it not require as much, nay, perhaps even more knowledge, skill, and originality to conduct a case to a successful issue on the

frontier, far from all the appliances of civilization, as it would among the busy haunts of men? A situation like this, to my mind, only increases the value of the armament with which the physician has fortified himself. Forced to rely upon himself alone, he will feel strong in the dictates of his own judgment, he will have no blind faith in his intuitions, but one well grounded, and for which he can give a reason; and in no situation will the mental resources at his command prove themselves more valuable to him. Latitude and longitude call for no distinction in the degree of education, which will make a man thoroughly at home in his profession, which will rightly prepare him for the issues of life and death, that, humanly speaking, will be placed in his hands.

Do not think that the sketch I have made is without its foundation in reality. The young men who enter our profession in France and Germany go through very much the same training that I have delineated. Let me give you an extract from an interesting work, entitled "Democracy and Monarchy in France," by Prof. Adams, of the University of Michigan. In the introduction to that work he portrays some of the causes which, to his mind, were the essential elements of the success of the Germans in the Franco-Prussian War. He says that the whole fabric of German society rests upon the theory "that whether you want a man for war or for peace, for a profession or for a trade, there is no way in which you can make so much of him as by training him, and training him not in parts, but as a whole: and furthermore that in all the contests of life, other things being equal, the trained men are sure to attain the highest success."

"The law makers of Germany said 'first of all to every parent, you must have every child of yours in school from the age of six to the age of fourteen: to neglect this obligation is a crime against the State, and will be punished by

law.' Then to the child they said 'Whatever business or profession you desire to follow in life, for that you must thoroughly fit yourself either as an apprentice or as a professional student.' If it were the latter they said to him, "' You must spend eight or nine years in a gymnasium,' corresponding to our academies and colleges, '*after* which you must devote at least three years to the study of your profession in a university.' They said to him 'Without these twelve years of preliminary training, eight or nine of which are collegiate, and three or four of which are professional, you can receive no degree, and until you have received a degree, you can collect no fee for legal advice, you can write no prescription, you can have no place as instructor in the smallest gymnasium in the land.'"

In order to show you what this degree in medicine means, let me quote from a letter published in last week's *Nation* with regard to this ordeal at the University of Leipzig. "The candidate must first present certificates of his whole course of instruction from the time he learned the alphabet down to the day he presents his application for the doctorate. His *technical course* is to cover a period of ten semesters (or five years). If his character and credentials are acceptable, he is required then to write an original disputation on any subject (chosen by himself) that may lie within the range of his profession. This is duly deliberated upon by the Faculty, being passed from one to the other until each has read it. This requires from fourteen days to three weeks alone. The disputation being declined, the matter ends there. If, however, the candidate is so fortunate as to have his work meet the approbation of the Faculty, he is then admitted to a rigorous examination in anatomy, microscopical, comparative, and general ; physiology, general and special ; general and special pathological anatomy ; general and special surgery ; general and special medicine ; obstetrics, ophthalmic surgery and medicine, diseases of children,

diseases of women, *materia medica*," &c. At the end of the first two years and a half he has been examined in all the elementary branches, such as botany, chemistry, physics, zoölogy, &c. Such is the experience of a graduate in medicine at Leipzig, and it corresponds materially with the demands at other German universities.

Do you wonder then, that, with all this careful preparation, German authorities abound, that the profession occupies an exalted position, where not a man can take a degree without all this preparation? In France as well, the medical career is much the same, and in both of these countries the practice obtains, to which I have alluded, of adding on the clinical instruction to the didactic courses already attended. The young men who swarm through the cliniques at Vienna, and Berlin, and Paris, have already accomplished their studies in anatomy and physiology, chemistry and *materia medica*, and now give their undivided attention to the practical part of the profession.

Contrasts have often been drawn between the relative standard of the profession in this country and abroad, and it has been asserted over and over again, with I think considerable truth, that among us the intellectual life of the profession is not active; that it is not productive. If this is true, and I think it is in a measure, it does not apply to the practical part of the profession. American surgery, we all know, is quoted and held in high esteem all over the continent of Europe. American ingenuity and boldness have led the way to many surgical triumphs. But when we come to consider the other branches of medical study, the experience of the past has shown us that most, I do not say all, of the original work, of the thorough pains-taking investigation, has come to us from the other side of the water. I am fully aware that this is less so now than formerly. The past ten years have witnessed great changes in this respect. The re-

sults of American studies in different branches of physiology, as for instance in the functions of nerves, and in the diseases arising from injuries to nerves, in the anatomy of the dislocations of the hip joint, and in venereal diseases, will compare favorably with the results of the best German efforts. Other instances might also be cited where admirable work has been achieved by our American brethren, but taken all together, they are by far too few. In order to place our profession here in the front rank, as compared with other countries, I believe we have great need of this higher medical education. We need that our medical men should be more prompt and ready to place at the disposal of others, the fruits of their long and varied experience. We need that the intellectual life of the profession should be stimulated, as it alone can be, by holding before it a lofty standard of excellence.

If, gentlemen, you have agreed with me in what I have said, you will admit that the ideal we hold before us is certainly high. Is it unattainable? I fain would hope that it is not. You and I may not live to see it realized, but I trust that our children will. What better legacy can a father leave to his children than a thorough and liberal education? Which one of us does not covet for his son better opportunities than he has himself enjoyed? If success has crowned your efforts; if some of you, with noble and heroic labors, have triumphed over the scanty advantages of your earlier days, how much more will your sons achieve, if you give them the opportunities that stand open to their hand. Thus will you fit them most thoroughly for the duties that will come to them, as they have come to you. Thus will you do your share towards elevating the standard of the profession. Thus will they become as shining lights, guiding public sentiment with wisdom, and achieving more than we for the benefit of their fellow-men.

